

Fāṭimah

RIFFAT HASSAN

Fāṭimah, the youngest daughter of Muhammad and his first wife Khadija, is known in the Muslim tradition as Zahra (the Radiant One) and is greatly venerated by all Muslims. She was born at Mecca but there is divergence regarding her date of birth in the early Arabic sources. It is generally believed that she was born between 605 and 609 C.E.

Among the few incidents reported about Fāṭimah's early life is her profound grief at her mother's death and consolation by her father, and her removal of refuse thrown from the Quraysh tribe at her father when he was at prayer.

Fāṭimah was married to 'Alī, the son of Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and protector, when she was between fifteen and twenty-one and he was twenty-five. Their union had many difficulties, ranging from poverty in the early years to marital discord. Muhammad, who loved Fāṭimah dearly, offered financial help to the couple and arbitrated in their disputes. He is also believed to have blocked 'Alī's intention to take another wife.

There are some references to Fāṭimah in historical accounts of events during and after Muhammad's lifetime, but they do not give a clear, comprehensive, or consistent picture of Fāṭimah, who died a few months after her father in 633 C.E.

The importance of Fāṭimah in the Muslim tradition is due primarily to the fact that, as the only surviving child of Muhammad, she continued his bloodline through her marriage to his cousin 'Alī, with whom she had two sons, Hasan and Husayn. The concept of *ahl al-bayt*, or the people of the Prophet's house, became confined to Muhammad, Fāṭimah, and her husband and sons.

As the result of the development particularly of Shiite piety, Fāṭimah became the center of a cult that regarded everything about her as sacred or miraculous, extending to her the attributes of impeccability and infallibility applied to the Prophet and the Imams. In his book *Fāṭimah Fāṭimah ast* (Fāṭimah Is Fāṭimah), the modern Iranian scholar 'Alī Shari'ati, making use of both historical and hagiographical sources, represents Fāṭimah as the model to be emulated by all women seeking self-actualization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Useful sources of biographical information are Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 2, edited by B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat, and J. Schacht (1965); and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Fatimah Bint Muhammad," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 5, edited by Mircea Eliade (1987).

References to Fāṭimah may be found in historical accounts about events in the life of Muhammad and the early Muslim community. There is also a great deal of hagiographical literature that focuses on Fāṭimah as she became preeminent in Shiite piety.

A popular book in English on Fāṭimah is Mohammad 'Alī Al-Haj Salmin, *Fatima, The Lady of the Light* (1934). Brief accounts of Fāṭimah's life may be found in books about noteworthy Muslim women, such as Muhammad Saeed Siddiqi, *The Blessed Women of Islam* (1982).

Non-English sources include Muhammad Na'ī, "Sawaneh Hayat Hazrat Saiyyada Fatimatuz Zahra," in *Binat-e-Arba'*, Lahore, 1997, and Syeda Ashraf Zafar, *Al-Fatima*, Lahore, 1982.

Article on "Fatimah," in *The Encyclopaedia of Women and World Religion*, edited by Serinity Young, Macmillan Library Reference USA, 1998, Volume I, p. 328